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ABSTRACT

The World Forum is a program that gives college students an opportunity to explore a particular problem of personal and/or social consequence in the context of its anticipated alternative futures. A general overview of this program, its characteristics, and an example of it in practice are presented in this paper. The overview tells what the World Forum is, why it emphasizes the future, why it is being proposed, how it is an alternative, if it replaces present curriculum in the Middle Colleges of the United States International University, why it is better, and why it should change at all. The section on special characteristics elaborates the important program features and expectations for students. The role of teamwork, faculty, and information resources are described in this section. An example of the World Forum in practice outlines the typical learning experience as including the following: identification of a particular concern or interest; examination of current trends as expected to affect the future; determination of whether an expected future is desirable; hypothesization of alternative futures; determination of how those respective futures might come to be; and examination of needed interventions in the present so as to evolve toward that desirable future. (KSM)

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THE WORLD FORUM

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THE WORLD FORUM
A General Overview

What is the World Forum, in general?

The World Forum is seen as a process of organizing an environment for learning--one that has its "feet" planted in the past and the present, and its gaze toward the future. It is personalized in that the learner is free to select the resources used, to explore casually or in depth, individually or with other learners a particular problem or concern at a community, state, national, or world level. In this way, each learner is free to pursue his own specific interests, while working with a group of other learners on a focus of common interest.

Visualize a group of students who are working together because each has expressed a common concern about pollution in today's society. They are engaged in an examination of current trends in water, on land, and noise pollution. They are actively exploring positive and negative consequences of a future that is expected on the bases of current trends (e.g., gradual death of oceans due to pollution, increase in economic wealth of the polluting nations, etc.). They are thinking up alternatives to the expected future, and exploring positive and negative consequences of these alternatives. Every so often, these students meet together with others who are examining different concerns such as population, genetic manipulation, and product recycling. The exchange of views and information stimulates new areas of study and exploration. And on it goes.[1]

This merging of common interests encourages outcomes that are greater than the sum of their parts (synergistic outcomes). Synergism may happen if several diverse lines of thought are merged and considered by the group in such a way as to share individual learnings with the group. The World Forum thus encourages the use of a variety of both traditional and innovative instructional techniques to make more likely synergistic outcomes. Among these techniques are simulation exercises, planning exercises, independent study, mediated instruction, brain-storming, and group discussions in an "arena for conjecture" where the "relatedness" of problems and solutions is explored.

The World Forum is a program that gives students an opportunity to explore a particular problem or concern of personal and/or social consequence. Each concern is explored in the context of its anticipated alternative futures (conceptions of the future that in certain respects differ from each other and from what might be expected on the basis of extending past and present trends

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1. If you care, turn to page 12
for a more detailed description of a typical World Forum sequence.

into the future), the possible positive and negative consequences of those alternative futures, the relationship of these particular alternative futures to other concerns and problems, and the means by which the most desirable of the alternative futures might be attained. Simultaneous student exploration of different but related concerns lead to their consideration of contingent human concerns which interact and encourage the development of increasingly more comprehensive views of the past, the present and the future.

Why all the emphasis on the future? Shouldn't we be concerned with the present?

The World Forum allows learners to explore what might be called the three-fold *present:* the present as we experience it, (e.g., all of our experiences including social interactions, educational pursuits, religious meanings, recreational activities, etc.), the past as a present memory, (e.g., personal interpretations of events, historical evidences, evidences of personal failures and successes, etc.), and the future as a present expectation. Although our minds are typically most strongly fixed on the present situation, with continuous flash-back recall of past events, it is the future that leads us to examine our past and present behaviors and policies in such a way as to permit meaningful planning for change. Such an examination is organized in three ways: first, as a future to attempt to prevent (to attempt to discourage or keep from happening because of anticipated negative consequences); second, as a future to attempt to adapt to (to accommodate to with the least loss of desirable or valued things), and finally, as a future to invent. By invent, we are referring to the specifying of goals that are felt desirable in light of certain value standards held , and the devising of means to reach those goals. These goals suggest alternative futures that are in some ways different than, and more desirable than the present or an extension of the present. Thinking of the *present* in this way compels us to think of the future as already arrived, for in the decisions we make now and the way we design our environment now (even by omission), the future is committed.

One more point. Although the learner is asked to think in the future, and work back in time to the present, the focus of his study is related to the past. The study of the future can't be divorced from the past. In his study of the future, the learner processes information from relevant disciplines, he catalogs and extrapolates trends, he collects data. In his planning to achieve the most desirable futures, the learner examines how the past has shaped the present, and what factors influence the shaping of the future. At all times in the World Forum, learners are in some way tied to the present and the past since the here and now includes the present as we experience it and the past as a present memory.

Actually, thinking of the future has been part of man's experiences from the word "go". Most teachers have their eye toward the future when they are involved in helping students prepare for the future. But there is a vast difference between preparing students for a future that is perceived of as equivalent to the present, and preparing them for a future, either in the sense of preventing, adapting to, or inventing. When the future is perceived as being capable of being influenced by decisions that are made now in the present, learners have an opportunity to equip themselves to handle change when it comes along.

Why is the World Forum being proposed?

Current education is basically oriented to the past. As Alvin Toffler has stated,

> "...our schools face backward toward a dying system, rather than forward to the emerging new society."

Earl Joseph, has suggested that "if we assume that a major purpose of education is to allow students to learn how to live during their life (during the future), then we must assume that education should stress that future."

This future orientation allows learners to imagine what the future could be. When such desirable alternative futures (futures that are in certain respects different than simply extensions of past and present trends into the future) are envisioned, leaners may then examine what actions they must take to bring the most desirable alternative about. In so doing, learners may create for themselves and society, more options than have been available to resolve pressing social issues.

In what way do you see the World Forum as an alternate to what is now available in the Middle College? Will it replace the present curriculum?

The easy way out for this question would be to say, "Yes, it does replace the curriculum." But this statement just can't be made. The reason is that the World Forum is personalized. A student may well go through Middle College and use the World Forum at a minimum. The result is that he wouldn't find the World Forum to be an overpowering part of his college experience. For that student, the World Forum would not replace anything. It would just be another item (or hurdle) that he was exposed to in college. On the other hand, it is entirely possible that another student would see the World Forum as a much larger and more important vehicle.

It is reasonable that as the events of our society make more demands upon the college student, the importance of a World Forum approach will increase. We could perceive of some sort of a major social change that would have an impact upon colleges in America so that students had to face those problems then and not five years down the line. In this situation, the World Forum might become a far more important part of the curriculum than it had been before the immediate concern arose. It is difficult to forecast what the World Forum will be like five or ten years from now, or how it will vary from campus to campus. To have answers to these questions now would certainly be of immense help in our planning for the World Forum. This is why we are proposing to use in the development of the World Forum the same procedures we recommend for looking at social problems. We are asking participants in the World Forum to work with us in looking at the long-term future of the program so that the decisions we make now have some chance of working in their favor (and ours) in the future.

It is recognized that no one innovative program is a panacea for solving all the problems and needs that might be identified in education. Further, it is recognized that what may seem to answer one set of problems and needs may create a whole new set of problems. This is why we have made the World Forum program a developing program, one where we continually evaluate its successes (and failures), and adapt its operation to better achieve the goals of the Middle College.

Why is the World Forum better than what we have now? Why should we change?

Many teachers wince at the statement, "Let's change." The first thing the teacher wants to say is, "What am I doing now that's so wrong." Well, it doesn't have to be wrong to need changing. Most teachers wouldn't be doing what they are doing in their own classrooms at the present time unless they felt it was the right thing and a good thing to do. The problem comes when change takes place in society that places new demands on education, or change takes place in a college program because innovations are introduced.

The goals of the Middle College were formulated in response to changes in society. United States International University wishes to develop leaders who are competent in human affairs, who may help people learn to live with themselves and others, and help develop methods whereby individuals, communities, and nations can live together in peace. Middle College is to develop students who:

- are self-confident
- are independent learners
- have positive self-concepts
- have constructive social commitments

The new Middle College program that stresses individualization and personalization of instruction is an example of the second type of change. Technology has placed education on the brink of making individualized instruction both efficient and effective. But it has separated people into study carrels and into independent learning situations. The World Forum will bring together people (both students, faculty, and community members) who are concerned with similar problems and who possess unique skills and knowledges that serve to complement this mutual problem-solving experience. Middle College should not be just independent study. Participating in the World Forum involves meeting in small groups to explore student-developed scenarios of the future; it involves working with others in attempting to discover how one social problem relates to another; it involves sharing with others how the same problem may be viewed at the community level or the national level or the world level; etc.

Another reason why the World Forum might be a change for the better is the fact that it will move away from the narrowness of specialized academic disciplines. The World Forum will deal with process: for example, how one goes about educating himself, how one goes about taking the responsibility for his own education, how one goes about organizing information and making evaluations and synthesizing information and feelings. This does not mean that what is learned in the way of subject matter is not worthwhile. But it does imply that what subject matter is learned will be related more to the process of learning in the context of an exmaination of social problems rather than simply

as an accumulation of specialized information that is being stored in the mind for future use.

SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE WORLD FORUM

What would you say is one of the most important characteristics of the World Forum?

Very high on the list would be the opportunity for the student and the teacher to deal with those things that are of primary or utmost importance to them. It is not surprising that what interests a student also interests people in positions of leadership. Every time students are polled concerning their interests, the areas that emerge are human or social problems that face the world today. The reason is that those same problems that might be talked about at abstract levels in the classroom are the very same problems that confront the world they live in here and now. It's hard to get more relevant that that.

Could you elaborate on that last point?

As the information explosion continues in almost every field, some individuals forecast a grim future to educational systems because they will become so swamped with new knowledge that students will be overwhelmed with the random and often confusing bits of the total sum of knowledge. One way that this situation can be dealt with is to help students learn the ways of obtaining, organizing, and processing information free from an inflexible educational organization which detracts from imaginative thinking. Through the personal relationship that an advisor develops with a learner in the World Forum, this is possible.

Another way of handling the information explosion is to help create life-long learners who are able to make decisions about their own educational programs so that ultimately they can control their own learning. Many educators forecast that by the year 2000, education will be looked upon as a life-long affair by most people--one that makes meaningful the increasingly available amounts of leisure time. As learning becomes life-long, the learner must develop the ability to plan and decide his particular learning needs. That is, the student must become responsible for his own education--that education which is necessary for survival as an operating adult. Very simply, the student must become increasingly competent in knowing what it is he needs to learn.

Are you proposing that the student learn only those things that interest him at the moment?

No. We are saying that the World Forum capitalizes upon student interests as a basis for their exploration into areas of concern in order that supposed interests can be tested and real interests sharpened. In discussing what education should be, Ralph Tyler puts it this way:

"Education is an active process. It involves the active

efforts of the learner himself. In general, the learner learns only those things which he does. If the school situations deal with matters of interest to the learner he will actively participate in them and thus learn to deal effectively with these situations. Furthermore it is argued that the increasing effectiveness with which he handles present situations guarantees his ability to meet new situations as they arise. Hence, it is essential to see that education provides opportunities for the student to enter actively into, and to deal wholeheartedly with, the things which interest him, and in which he is deeply involved, and to learn particularly how to carry on such activities effectively.

There are many educators who do not consider attention to the present interest of students as an adequate educational program because one of the functions of education is to broaden and deepen the student's interest so that he will continue his education long after he has ended his formal school training. But even these educators recognize the value of beginning with present student interests as a point of departure."

We do have two criteria for helping to focus student interest selection:

1) The interest can and must be explored in the context of the future;
2) The interest can and must be related to other concerns.

The World Forum is designed to work with the continual emergence of new and modified interests of learners. However, sufficient referencing of interests by students from among peers, faculty advisors and the reality forces of society-at-large are also a part of World Forum so that students have ample opportunity and challenge to arrive at their true interests.

Could you elaborate on what is expected of a student going through the World Forum?

The student will be expected to explore, both individually and with others, a particular focus of present concern, for example, ecology. In his exploration, he will not be expected to follow a set sequence of activities or to study a given body of knowledge. On the other hand, he would be expected to direct his energies in three general areas.

I. Studying the Future

Identifying a wide range of alternative futures. Here, the student is expected to process information from the relevant disciplines that fit his selected focus; for example, to catalog and extrapolate different trends in ecological management, to examine value structures of society regarding ecology that underwrite alternative futures, and to identify and assess alternative future options in improving the ecological balance.

II. Planning to Realize the Desired Future

Planning to get from now to then. Here, the student is expected to examine how the past has shaped the present, for example, what forms of ecological controls in the past have influenced today's controls, and to project how present trends imply expected futures, e.g., what are we doing in ecological control today that will effect tomorrow? He will juxtapose these expected futures with alternative futures that are judged as more desirable, in other words, suggesting changes in today's ecological controls that will mean a modification to tomorrow's effects; thus providing an analytic framework from which particular factors influencing each may be isolated. An analysis of these isolated factors might point toward action alternatives that he might personally take to change the present, or it might suggest further study and hypothesis testing.

III. Changing the Present in Light of the Future

Intervening now. Here, the student would be expected to apply the knowledge and insights that have been gained. This might take the form of recommending programs of action or policies, or influencing decision-making in the community (as broadly conceived as needed). It may take the form of testing ideas generated in previous activities and continuing to explore possible relationships between expected and desirable futures and the means of obtaining these futures, through the design and use of systems simulations. It might also take the form of experiences that allow learners to explore their own value structure by analyzing the ways in which these have shaped proposed alternative futures.

Could you explain just how students decide to work alone or to work together in teams? What activities bring students together?

One of the first things that happens in the World Forum is that each student develops a common understanding with an advisor and the coordinator as to what each is going to do while pursuing the program. In arriving at this understanding, time will be spent in exploring with students what is on their minds, individually and in groups. It could be some social problem of the day, or some concern in the social sciences. In exploring what might be studied, what might be synthesized, what might be analyzed, and what might be evaluated in relation to these concerns, students will be able to say, "Now this is a problem that really interests me." The question is, "Does it interest others." At this point, if there is a wide range of problems identified as being interesting, some narrowing down of these problems will take place: both student activated and advisor influenced. At that point, it may become clear that certain students naturally cluster into teams because of similar or complementary interests.

Even though a team decides to work together, it does not mean that they always work as a team. In most cases, much study will be independent, each member taking responsibility for specific areas that need exploration before the team is able to complete its tasks.

Linking individuals and groups who are exploring different foci will be the arena for conjecture, an intellectual amphitheater for future planning which provides a feedback linkage among all participants. Here is an opportunity for individuals to share ideas through written or oral reports with others and gain feedback through discussion. In the arena learners who have explored a particular focus will have an opportunity to sharpen thinking using input from others who may have examined different foci.

Initially the arena for conjecture may be thought of as a large group learning activity taking place at one location. However, as we are able to employ advanced closed-circuit television technology, small groups may then communicate directly cross-campus or even cross-world.

Not all students would probably be involved in any particular arena for conjecture at any one time. In fact, several "arenas" may be conducted simultaneously. However, it is thought to be in the best interests of the student to narrow the diversity of the foci being explored during any one term to those that would relate rather highly to each other. This is an open issue, and has yet to be resolved.

What is the role of the faculty member in the World Forum? Does that role make it possible for him to do what he likes best, that is teach?

In the World Forum, once the orientation is past, instruction may take place any time a student comes to a faculty member. Here the teacher becomes an integral part of the process because of his relationship to what the students are bringing. In essence, the faculty-advisor is the primary source of action motivation. He personally assists each student in becoming involved with the World Forum and acts as a sounding board for ideas and as a guide to other useful resources as he does with each advisee in other learning experiences.

What other resources are required to conduct the World Forum?

People Resources. In addition to the Middle College advisor, the immediate community as well as the world community via modern communication would be an integral part of the student's learning experience. In a student's examination of forecasts about the future, for example, the student might contact a community leader who could furnish his latest thinking and information available to him about a particular situation. Another resource would be other students. Needless to say, if the focus of concern dealt with an international problem, and students were on campus from countries associated with that problem, an immense interchange of information, especially that which would not be found in texts such as feelings about the situation and information about the culture and its relation to the problem, could take place. Students would provide a constant resource for idea testing by other students. Again, because of past or present experience and dissimilar backgrounds, the sharing of ideas provides valuable enrichment. As the World Forum progressed through time, students who are well underway in the program might supply continuity and leadership to those just beginning.

Information Resources. In order to imagine the future and plan ways to achieve the most desirable alternatives, information is needed. It makes little sense to have learners continually "reinvent the wheel", e.g., discover the same forecasts, when this information could be readily available. This information may be contained in documents, computer banks such as The World Game and The Institute for the Future, or from diverse informal sources. It may be in the form of facts, data, opinions, or speculations. It may have been generated by experts or by World Forum participants. It may be concise lists of information, or lengthy reports on world trends. Whatever the format and source, it must be collected, indexed, and referenced in such a way that other learners have access to it for their planning. There must be a means of continually renewing information. Further, linkages must be made continually with all groups who may have information that may be useful to learners. The burden of this responsibility will rest initially with each Middle College, but as the University accumulates a history of such efforts and develops more advanced information processing structure, a shift in responsibility to the Univerisity will occur.

To what extent will the student-generated information about the future be available to new students?

The process of discovery is crucial here. The primary purpose of the World Forum is not for students to predict the future, but to engage in stimulating learning experiences that lead toward achievement of Middle College goals. To this end, the "raw data" that a student may use to build a "scenario" of a desirable alternative future will always be available to new students. However, that scenario - the synthesis of raw data - may not be available to new students, while it would be available to his peers in the arena for conjecture.

How do you propose to link the student in the World Forum with the world community, or even other USIU Middle Colleges, for that matter?

Obviously, the World Forum could be conducted with just books, reports, and students. In fact, each Middle College campus could conduct a World Forum independently, and not jeopardize any aspect of the program. But the exciting thing to contemplate is an inter-campus communication network around the world that opens up the opportunity of input representing different cultures and different viewpoints. We can imagine simulation exercises on an international crisis, for example, that would link up campuses, each taking the responsibility of having their students play the roles of leaders in a particular country. Or, we can imagine students at different Middle College campuses exploring the same problem, but at national levels, getting together to examine that problem at the world level. Each student would have an immense amount of information about that problem, but from the perspective of his particular country, that could be shared. As the World Forum becomes operational on the various Middle College campuses, it is not inconceivable that a log of events and listing of problems being considered could be shared with each campus so that possible linkages could be explored.

What special staff are required to conduct the World Forum?

At each campus, a World Forum coordinator is required. One coordinator may be able to handle the program on a small campus. Perhaps more than one coordinator would be required on larger campuses. It is the responsibility of the coordinator to handle all of the logistical details that keep the program going. For example, he would be responsible for scheduling physical facilities, for seeing that students had the proper materials that outlined World Forum activities, for scheduling the arena for conjecture, for seeing that all of the evaluation data were collected and so forth. We see this job as essentially being a full time job at some of the larger campuses. In addition to his coordination responsibilities, he would also have a number of student advisees.

EXAMPLE OF A WORLD FORUM IN PRACTICE

What might a typical World Forum Sequence look like?

1. Each participant might receive in advance of the World Forum a readiness package to stimulate his own thinking about current social problems (transportation, housing, war, life styles, etc.) Expected trends in each area included in the package might be forecast into the near and more distant future, say 1985 and 2020. For example, if we maintain our present world-wide rate of population growth, famine would be likely in 1985.

2. Once participants had gathered and met with each other an orientation to future thinking might begin. Films about future trends and ways of thinking might include Cosmic Zoom, La Jeté, or Omega. A variety of forecasting techniques to peer into the future might be presented. For example, participants might begin to project their own personal futures through Delphic[2] probes or begin to anticipate what future social systems might evolve. Additionally, the arena for conjecture might stimulate common communication across a variety of personal concerns to encourage broadened thinking for each individual.

3. As the World Forum proceeds it might be composed of individuals pursuing their own areas of respective concern (ranging from marine ecology to future political systems) or as groups of individuals who share similar concerns. Each individual or team might commit themselves in writing to: a) a particular focus, b) general experiences anticipated (see below), c) and a fixed year to project toward. Fulfillment of the commitment would be judged by mutual consent of student and advisor subject to renegotiation as necessary.

4. Typical learning experiences might include:

   a) Identification of a particular concern of interest.
   b) Studying the future by first examining current trends as they may be expected to culminate in the future.
   c) Determination if such an expected future seems desirable by examination of that future's positive and negative consequences. For example, given the present tri-polarization of the nation-state international system, global war might be expected prior to 1984. What would be the positive and negative consequences of this expected future?
   d) Hypothesization of alternative futures to undesirable expected futures may then be undertaken. Again, the positive and negative consequence of the alternative future are examined. For example, one might postulate as an alternative future to the previous example, a unified global political system by the year 2000 A.D. What then would be the positive and negative consequences of this alternative future?

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2. The Delphi technique is a method of pooling opinion about factual questions--particularly in the context of predictions of the future.

e) Once expected and alternative futures have been postulated students might then work backwards from the future to the present to determine how those respective futures came to be. For example, positive consequences of a unified global political system in the year 2000 A.D. may be analyzed by writing descriptions of events that occurred in proceeding years which shaped that future. Working backwards one can then progressively see the inter-relations of systems of interaction in 1995, 1990, 1985, 1980, 1975 and so forth.

f) Finally, if the "events" as postulated by the students seem desirable, they may examine what interventions need to be made in the present (that may now appear to be more or less complex) in order to shape that future's realization. Interventions can be made in a variety of ways--for example, varying dependent and independent variables in system simulations to see alternative outcomes , through community action, etc. What is important is the increased realization of what makes the present and how the present might evolve toward a desirable future.

What instructional means will be employed in the World Forum?

Means for study and discussion throughout the learning experiences will include: instructional packages; mediated materials; library resources; people resources (campus, community, and worldwide); direct community experience in action programs: intellectual, emotional, creative and vocational experiences within specific concern areas; individual effort as well as small and large group discussions and experiences related to identified concerns; and simulation experiences.